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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000813

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SUBJECT: Niger: Early Warning of Increase in Food Insecurity

NIAMEY 00000813 001.2 OF 002

1. Summary: There are increasing official and anecdotal reports that this year's harvest will be poorer than that of most recent years with some areas facing acute stress. FFPO made site visits across the agro-pastoral zone and found poor or negligible harvest in many villages. Populations are already reacting with increased migration for work and consumption of wild, less desirable and less nutritious leaves and seeds. USAID is meeting with MYAP partners to share perspectives and plan immediate mitigation interventions and plan a longer term response. End summary.

Season at End: Crops Results Mixed, Pasturage Poor

2. The growing season in Niger is over. The results of the growing season are mixed. It is generally agreed that pasturage is bad across the pastoral zone. There are a number of reports of significant crop failures across the agro-pastoral zone and in the rain-fed agriculture zones of Niger. The zones affected stretch from the border of Burkina Faso in the west to the Chadian border in the east.

Millet and Niebe Hit Hard, GON Response Unclear

3. Crops affected include two of the major subsistence and cash crops: millet and niebe (black-eyed peas). Niebe is a major cash crop for many farmers in the southern region of the country. Last year the Government of Niger (GON) purchased large quantities of niebe at above-market price in order to provide increased income for producers. Most of the product was sold to Nigeria. It is not known what the GON will do this year given the crop failure.

Field Survey Reveals N-S Disparity, Total Losses

4. The USAID Food for Peace Officer (FFPO) traveled in the agricultural and agro-pastoral zones of Dosso, Tahoua, Maradi, and Zinder regions the week of September 28-October 2. There was clearly a wide disparity in grain quantity and quality in various

locations. The further north the FFPO traveled, the poorer the grain quality became to the extent that in Mirrah and Tanout Departments, many villages demonstrated no harvestable grain at all.

Locals reported total grain loss in areas across Zinder Region. An NGO partner reported significant or total loss of harvest in Northern Dogondoutchi Department and increased cases of malnutrition in the health centers. We are getting similar reports from visitors to Illela Department north of Birni-N'Konni. One NGO partner country director was in agro-pastoral Diffa during the last week of September, and reported widespread crop failure and the possibility of increased conflict as pastoralists encroach into cultivators' territory. While some regions in Niger frequently suffer from crop losses due to erratic rainfall patterns, this year the problem is much more widespread.

#### Migration Early, Non-Traditional Foods Eaten

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¶15. Villagers reported that migration to work in Nigeria had begun earlier and by more men than usual. Women were reporting that soon they would migrate to the nearby towns to find menial work such as grain pounding or babysitting. Some villagers are eating bush foods, both leaves and grains, instead of harvested domestic cereals.

#### 2009 Harvest below Ave. of Past 7 Years

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¶16. In September, the monthly food security information bulletin from the Office of the Prime Minister reported the prospect for the 2009 harvest of cereals was below the average of the last seven years. The same bulletin quoted the Office of Agricultural Statistics that compared the probable 2009 harvest to recent past years (2002 to 2008), noting it was the second-worst harvest in that period. The harvest in 2004-2005 was considered a year of famine and resulted in a large influx of international support, both monetary and grain supplies. The report predicted, if this harvest is in fact similar

NIAMEY 00000813 002.2 OF 002

to that of the previous time period, approximately 4,000 villages with a population of 3 million could experience deficits in harvests. An experienced observer of Niger agriculture noted grain harvest may be more than 20 percent below an average year. The inter-ministerial annual assessment of the harvest with support from CILS, FAO, FEWS-NET, and others is just beginning. The results are not expected for several weeks or longer. Furthermore, accurate and candid reporting from GON entities is questionable.

#### Early Action to Mitigate Worst Effects

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¶17. It is difficult at this time to accurately describe the magnitude of the food security problem (both geographically and in terms of nutritional stress on vulnerable populations). It is, however, clear that early action to provide access to food for the most at-risk populations will help mitigate the worst effects of the food security problem. To that end, FFPO has convened a meeting of MYAP partners to share information on the agricultural and nutritional situation and explore possible interventions that can be implemented immediately within the MYAP program and locations of interventions.

#### Cash-for-Work, Nutritional Interventions, Reserves Key

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¶18. For example, planned cash-for-work activities can be started earlier than planned to expedite resource transfer. Nutrition interventions that are planned for late in the year or in 2011 can be moved forward. The PROSAN partners (CRS, CARE, and Helen Keller) have 250 MT of soy-fortified bulgur as an emergency reserve. Prudent targeted programming of the reserves can begin in the most vulnerable regions. The MYAP partners will also begin to plan interventions that might require additional food and monetary resources for which they can seek donor support.

¶19. Note: The Mission will continue to monitor the developments on the ground aggressively and with the help of established reporting channels such as FEWS-NET, the UN, and GON-related sources and develop a more comprehensive picture of the geographical and humanitarian impact of this year's harvest. End note.

WHITAKER